



# MOVING BODIES

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CAMILO CORTÉS





# *MOVING BODIES*

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# ABSTRACT

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Moving Bodies is a maker's personal narrative. It illustrates a journey towards finding one's voice as a designer through a material experimentation process that resulted in the making of The Moving Bodies. The project begins with self doubt and a question: "Who am I?", and continues with the evolution of the author's thoughts as a maker leading to the creation of his sculpture series Moving Bodies. A material experimentation process in ceramics is narrated through the analysis and self-reflections of the author's own practice. By studying himself and his own mind, he explores his values and through an hands approach he is able to deeply analyse his intuition, a key point to understand creative decisions. Learning by doing, letting go of set guidelines and prioritising the value of a maker's process over planning and clear cut results are defining points of this body of work. The narrative is far from linear, conscious design decisions are showcased with a no-nonsense attitude and most importantly, a detailed analysis is made on where those decisions stem from.

Moving Bodies does not draw clear lines between experimental ceramic samples, the very first material development tests and the final outcomes. The process of creating or stumbling upon a new ceramic material, followed by trying to master and understand the material results in an extremely hands-on diary focused both on personal thoughts and technical information. Material and maker co-creation as a method is introduced, the

moving bodies, free flowing ceramic bodies, is the main collaborator to the maker himself. Every test piece or sculpture is essentially the maker creating a playground for the material to free-flow.

Material co-creation is a back and forth dialogue between the maker and the material he is trying to guide, form and understand. The Moving Bodies are created through many unorthodox methods of crafting ceramics and setting up molding and forming techniques for the material in the ceramic kilns (Where the materials go up to 1240 Degrees, melts and re-solidifies). The kilns have to stay closed for long periods of time, which could be up to 48 hours, and it is in fact the material that is at work during this process, completing the task assigned to it by the maker who only has to wait and wonder until it is safe to open the kiln and see what 'they' have made.

The project Moving bodies is the result of a long hands on process of self-discovery and material experimentation to find a unique voice as a maker. Hands and mind work together through tacit knowledge and that is a maker's biggest strength in order to embed a story, a meaning in the piece itself. The making process of Moving Bodies is a recollection of thoughts, events and objects that allow the reader and viewer to understand how and why a process of material experimentation facilitated a personal process of discovery.



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## PRELUDE

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### Impromptu

This is your body or nothing  
a cloud or a wheel  
a horse or five fingers  
what a joy to be alive  
or the rain  
a sound of scissors  
four steps a whistle  
a shout a room  
another shout  
a comet in the sky  
a knife in the mouth  
two open eyes a sphere  
two more eyes  
seven arms one hand  
three or four tigers  
a blonde head  
a mother's kiss  
forty broken mirrors  
forty uncle Carlos'  
a phone ringing  
a corpse on the floor  
a bored man  
whatever story  
a phone ringing  
three or four tigers  
how late I lie  
I am alone  
one word or another  
no matter what thing  
a phone ringing  
a corpse in the floor  
a breed of dog  
a french perfume  
etcétera etcétera

Jorge Eduardo Eielson

Taken from "Tema y variaciones" Ginebra, 1950

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*These words transport me to another place, another body and another life. When I read this poem I can feel Eielson's thoughts, I can see images. He paints with words. He puts me in a special mood, like I am aware of my thoughts, awake, introspective and uneasy.*

*It has been a long time creating, designing, making, but I never bothered to think why. This thesis starts with questions about my practice, about myself.*

*Who am I? What do I create? Why do I create it?*









# HOW TO BE CAMILO CORTÉS

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## WHO AM I? WHAT DO I CREATE? WHY DO I CREATE IT?

“The most simple questions are the hardest ones to answer.” said a friend a random day in the workshop when we talked about these questions and their relevance in the life of a maker. This phrase echoed in my head and revealed many thoughts I was hiding inside my head.

I did not know what I wanted to create, most of the things I was doing felt meaningless, it seemed that everything I was making was because I had to. I really enjoyed school but there was something missing. I wanted to find my voice and create a project that does not feel like a obligation. This thesis is a statement and a step towards being Camilo Cortés.

These questions frame this document, I never intended to have a clear answer or a definitive solution, but rather to take a step to understand the importance of asking yourself these kind of questions. Questions to keep your creative mind focused and aim for self discovery and personal expression. I did not find the answer to any of the questions. As you get closer to the solution the answer starts to change, just because you asked. It is a vicious circle of mystery, one that allows creativity and originality to spark without control, restrictions or filter.

I wanted to define my own approach, one that would allow me to create a project centered around me as an individual, an introspective practice that revolves around the traits that define me as a person and therefore a designer.

Then I asked myself another set of questions: what is next? What have you learned? What are you planning? I have never been a planning person myself, I came up with a simple and broad answer:

I want to find my voice. I had no idea of what the outcome or result of this project would be. So instead of focusing on the outcome, I decided to focus on the process in order to develop a method. One to enable discovery and expression, tailored to my own workflow, personality and mindset.

This thesis started with a practice led approach focused towards ceramics. In the beginning there was no clear goal. The aim was just to discover a scenario that allowed a considerable amount of work to be done and enabled me to explore and experiment freely in order to understand my own thinking process and create a series; that I later named Moving bodies. I believe that the process is more important than the actual outcome, I wanted to develop my own expression, study, analyze and create based on personal experiences and experimentation.

Moving Bodies is a series of pieces made using ceramic materials that melt in the firing process, as a result, movement is captured in the piece. The pieces explore this phenomena by presenting an interaction between material and maker unique to Camilo Cortés; unique in the sense that is the result of a personal journey to study, discover and understand the moving bodies.

These pieces are one of the outcomes of this project, the tangible element that will allow me to illustrate how my head works. This document presents in a first person narrative the experiences and thoughts that resulted in the making of Moving Bodies and defining a way of working from this experience.









## WHO AM I

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*To understand the process and the project is important to give some context on me as a person and as a designer, since this process is all based on my personal experience.*

## CAMILO CORTÉS

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The best work of intuitive expression I have seen is a jazz album by Jon Benjamin, in which he played piano in a jazz band without knowing how to play piano, and then recorded the whole thing to publish an album. I still remember back in 2015 where I was when I listened for the first time to the Jazz Daredevil. This piece of music and comedy made me reconsider many things about my life and my how I was taking myself too seriously as a person and designer. Since that day I promised myself that I would do only things that are fun. I am going to be a daredevil.

I have a background in communication design, but all my life I have had the interest in making physical objects such as products or art pieces. I have been somewhat split in two parts: one part making objects and studying crafts, and the other part focused on media production, digital design and animation.

I never felt like the best in any of the mentioned fields, but I have a broad understanding and skill sets on many creative fields. My working process is consistent through different disciplines, I always try to discover and understand before trying to make anything. This means that, in order to learn I study and mix experiences to achieve my goal which is to create something new.

Not everything is about me though, I like to engage in conversations and hear criticism of my work.

I have a particular way of expressing myself when it comes to describing form, I assign sounds to shapes and complement the idea with my hands to communicate what I

mean. It often leads to more confusion and discussion which in my opinion is good. Since I am thinking with many different senses these seemingly random gestures are a great idea generator.

The learning experience is the most important part of any process. My mindset while working on any field is the same, the first thing is a question, what skill do I have to learn now? I will jump to learn and understand, to be able to create using the new knowledge supported by all my previous knowledge. Knowledge acquired, combined with existing knowledge allows me to create freely.

Finally, through my practice, I often find myself lost in thought, as if every individual idea is disconnected from one another and I just get bombarded by thoughts and images that make my process chaotic and disorganized. I like it this way, it is a good mindset for creativity, where new connections and new meaning can be created.

With this research document, I want to precisely consolidate the way Camilo Cortés works. In order to define, document and present my approach, I need to understand and display my own work in a transparent and clear way. In other words, I want to open a door into my head so anyone reading this document can understand what happens inside: All the decisions and experiences.









## INTROSPECTION

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Most of my life I lived in Bogotá, a big city saturated by noise, people, cars, lights, words, thoughts, colors, scents, dust, nature, concrete, bricks, rain, sun. A place that is inspiring on its own way, where I constantly felt overloaded as I was taking in more than I could process. In 2016 I moved to Finland. Here I discovered a different nature of uncertainty, my head was no longer saturated as it was in Bogotá, I was now saturated by silence, some days that the only thing I would hear was my voice, once the noise was gone I knew that I need to hear myself.

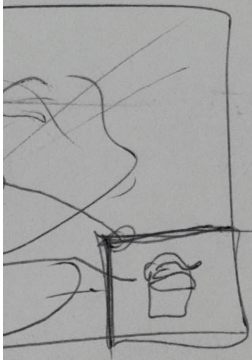
Within this silence I started a journey in which the destination was foggy and unclear, but there was a goal: to hear myself, and in this document, present what happens inside my head when I design. This was the first step to find my voice, in order to define who I am and I create, since I found myself lost as a designer.

When I started this material experimentation project, it was going to be a technical review on the process, but after writing a few lines talking about recipes,

materials and numbers I realized that the most interesting part is what happens when the maker discovers new things and grows with the material he is developing. This is the reason why I centered this thesis around me and my process.

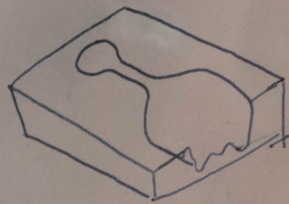
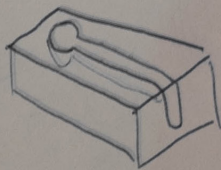
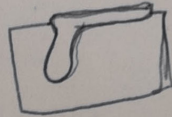
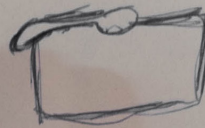
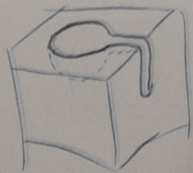
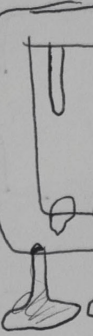
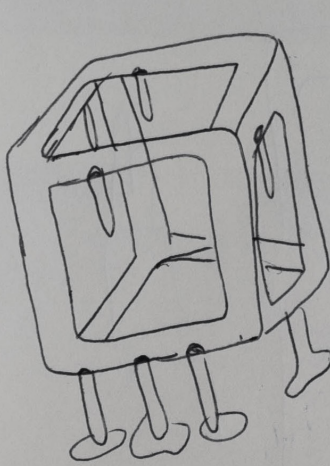
Why do I make certain decisions? What is the reason to make something? Is there a line between the maker and the object that separates them as two different entities? The whole project shifted towards my own experience and how to be Camilo Cortés. I wanted to find answers to these questions.

L. Malafouris has a confirming approach to the topic, stating there is a relationship more than just physical between the material and the maker, “The shaping of a pot becomes an act of collaboration between the potter and the mass of wet clay spinning upon the wheel.” (Knappett & Malafouris, 2010) In this project I wanted to insert myself into this kind of relationship, give myself an opportunity to experience it rather than just read or write about it.



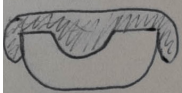
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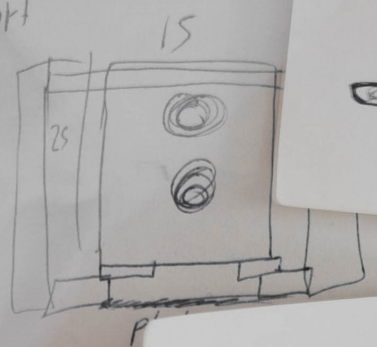
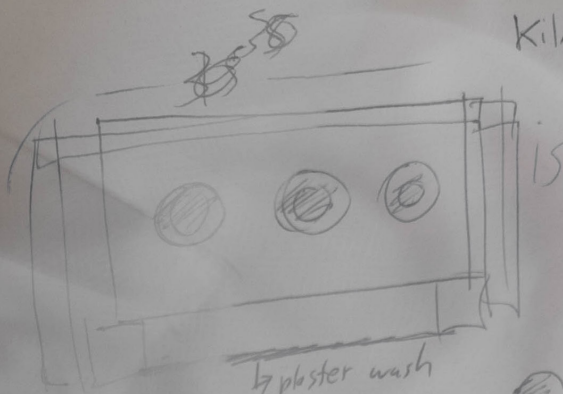


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Kiln support



→ plaster wash



→ plaster

Design  
research  
society

experimental  
knowledge





## HOW I THINK

*The way I think while making is often influenced by my past experiences, my subconscious expectations and influences. I have attempted to dive deep down into my thought process while creating.*







## LEARNING BY EXPERIENCE

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For Margaret Boden, the creative process is a complex and paradoxical matter that connects many aspects of the individual. To understand it, it is necessary to take the person and context in consideration as well as the relation to object and thought.

“If we take seriously the dictionary-definition of creation, ‘to bring into being or form out of nothing’, creativity seems to be not only unintelligible but strictly impossible. No craftsman or engineer ever made an artefact from nothing” (Boden 2004, p. 11 - 12)

During my studies at Aalto University, independent work and self learning was encouraged and this was in my opinion, the best part of my education. We were let free at the workshops to learn by doing, we had all the support of the workshop masters to enable us to achieve any idea and freely explore our voices as designers.

The knowledge and the skills of a practicing artist or designer have become an important part of the research process. This has enriched the field of research with a new viewpoint. It has also influenced the overall tendencies of research topics by shifting the emphasis from artists and artefacts towards creative processes and the role of the maker in the process. (Mäkelä & Latva-Somppi, 2011)

Studying the creative process and the maker is a valid practice to understand contemporary design. Since the physical outcome cannot be studied without understanding the creative process. A creative process that includes practical

and theoretical work. In my opinion from an academic perspective, the voice of a designer adds more value to the work than the objects themselves, an example of this is Mafé’s Rephrasing Voice: Art, Practice-led Research and the Limits and Sites of Articulacy, in which he researches practice through exploring and finding what voice is and what it means for an artist.

Mafé (2010) mentions that this voice is an important part of practice led research processes and states that the concept of ‘voice’ functions to interrogate what is to know and how one can know. (2010. p 118). He also mentions that the value of this voice lies in the creation and sustaining of openly emergent spaces for thought and critical (research) reflection through the tangible presence of the artwork in the research.(Mafé, 2010. p 121).

Therefore, finding this voice requires practical work and reflection upon one’s practice and production. In my case, it is a detailed study of myself as a designer, an effort to understand and rationalize this voice by dissecting my own existing process. The goal is not to create a set of instructions to recreate my process but to demonstrate the value of understanding and trusting one’s voice as a creator.

## GATHERING INFORMATION

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In ancient Greece, Socrates mentioned that the first task of man is to know oneself, and he declared that an unexamined life is not worth living (470-399 BC), with this in mind, I planned a way to collect information from different stages of the project in order to understand intuition and creative voice in my making process.

Understanding intuition in decision making is challenging, since more often than not the choices we make are automatic, but why? Polanyi explains that tacit knowledge is the set of experiences, skills and ideas that people have but they cannot verbalize, this can be for example the ability to identify faces of people (1966).

In my experience this knowledge is deeply connected with intuition and taste, since many things we find enjoyable can be traced to previous experiences, for example, the color palette and shapes of my production are close to the fruits and cartoons I enjoyed during my childhood. I realized this by reflecting on my own production, but the ideas were always there commanding me from the past, from my intuition.

To locate intuition I need to analyze my decision making process, what happens when Camilo is confronted with a situation, a decision is made in three steps:

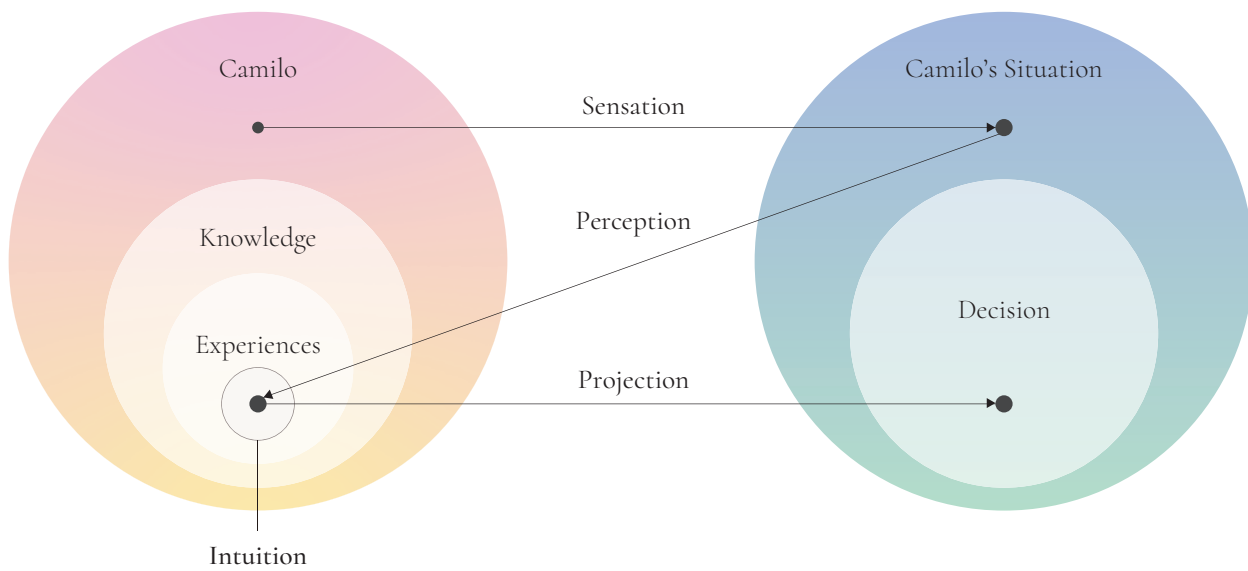
**Sensation:** The first impression of the situation, often a physical signal understood by my senses.

**Perception:** An analysis to the situation, to understand the problem.

**Projection:** Based on positive and negative experiences project my knowledge into making a decision.

This connection of experiences and perception result in a projection of myself into the situation, this process between perception and projection is where my intuition is.

## My Decision Making Process



Verbalizing intuition was the first task to understand it, so I decided to use an Informal Conversational Interview defined by Gall, Gall, and Borg (2003) as dependant “...entirely on the spontaneous generation of questions in a natural interaction, typically one that occurs as part of ongoing participant observation fieldwork. Because the conversation appears natural, the research participants may not even realize they are being interviewed” (p. 239). I found this appropriate since I could perform interviews with myself at anytime to collect any thoughts even while performing a task or afterwards, outside the workshop.

I constantly asked myself questions about everything and documented them in a little notebook. Since the goal was to understand intuition, during working hours I would

ask about the results, samples and my mood. And since I was permanently with the subject of study (me) I could also ask about non work related topics in order to further understand decision making and rationale. This process allowed me to paint a precise picture of all the process through thoughts and quotes collected in the heat of the moment.

In addition to this I created a moodboard to prepare my mind and to explain my inspiration process and how gathering inspiration can be used later in my own production. The moodboard is a personal take on the tool so keep in mind this is a moodboard for Camilo Cortés.

## *MOODBOARD*









“I like to empty my mind to go to the deepest thoughts that I have, is really inspiring to stare at nothing before creating.”









## HOW I WORK

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*My hands work with the mind while I am making.  
Learning by doing creates results that the mind can not  
plan or come up with on its own. This is why the process  
is just as important, if not more important than the  
final results.*

I have an approach that does not prioritize the outcome. The obsession with the deliverable is the main factor that drove me away of product design. Most of the courses I took while studying at Aalto, as a part of the Product and Spatial Design programme required some outcome to prove that you did something. The exception was Material Experimentation, a course that I really enjoyed where the outcome was just the practice itself.

Mäkelä (2007) states that “practice-led research is characterised by focusing on issues, concerns and interests that are explored and manifested through the production of artefacts” (p. 159), I want to define a research approach, one designed to work with my own head, which is often messy, disengaged, selfish and disoriented. The production of objects will support the process, since I want to explore and understand the processes involved in making, as a driver of a material experimentation project.

This approach is intended to address me as a unique entity, it does not intend to control the disorder and chaos present in my practice, it is not a tool to change my mindset and make me more organised. It is quite the opposite, it is meant to allow me to make the mess I need to make, to travel inside my own head aimlessly to experiment and create.

Mafé (2010) explores the value of the artists voice and the importance of addressing this voice in practice led research studies. He states that said value lies in the creation and sustaining of openly emergent spaces for thorough and critical (research) reflection through the tangible presence of the artwork. (p. 121) I want to explore and analyze my own voice to reflect on the process that led to the making of Moving Bodies.

In short, it is an approach created to enhance my personal expression while keeping a systematic approach, one that can adapt to many changes during the project, a system that has no commitment clauses in which artistic intuition and personal expression are the best criteria for decision making. Therefore Surrealism is a natural inspiration for me. André Breton's (2012) definition of the movement is an inspiring reference for this method.

*SURREALISM - “Psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express — verbally, by means of the written word, or in any other manner — the actual functioning of thought. Dictated by thought, in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern.” (Breton, 2012)*

My intent is to generate ideas and objects through my own experience, generating a self referenced aesthetic and concept. I consider it relevant to bring up this definition that I read back in high school, as it was the first text I had ever read on art and it definitely did not make sense back then, but as I progress and get older it makes more and more sense.

*In this thesis I define concept as the meaning that connects abstract ideas and physical objects.*

Now I feel in good position to explore these principles, It is worth mentioning that I just draw inspiration from the ideas presented and I do not consider myself totally aligned with the surrealist movement from 1924, but I am interested in exploring the free self expression that the movement preaches.

The predetermined goal is to generate material and conceptual developments simultaneously. Since I want to embed meaning in the material, it is important that the concepts and the materials are connected from the beginning of the process. These cannot be disconnected since they are discovered and created at the same time.



The concept and the material work together, one doesn't make sense without the other, therefore the object has an artistic justification in its existence.

My approach is divided into five stages:

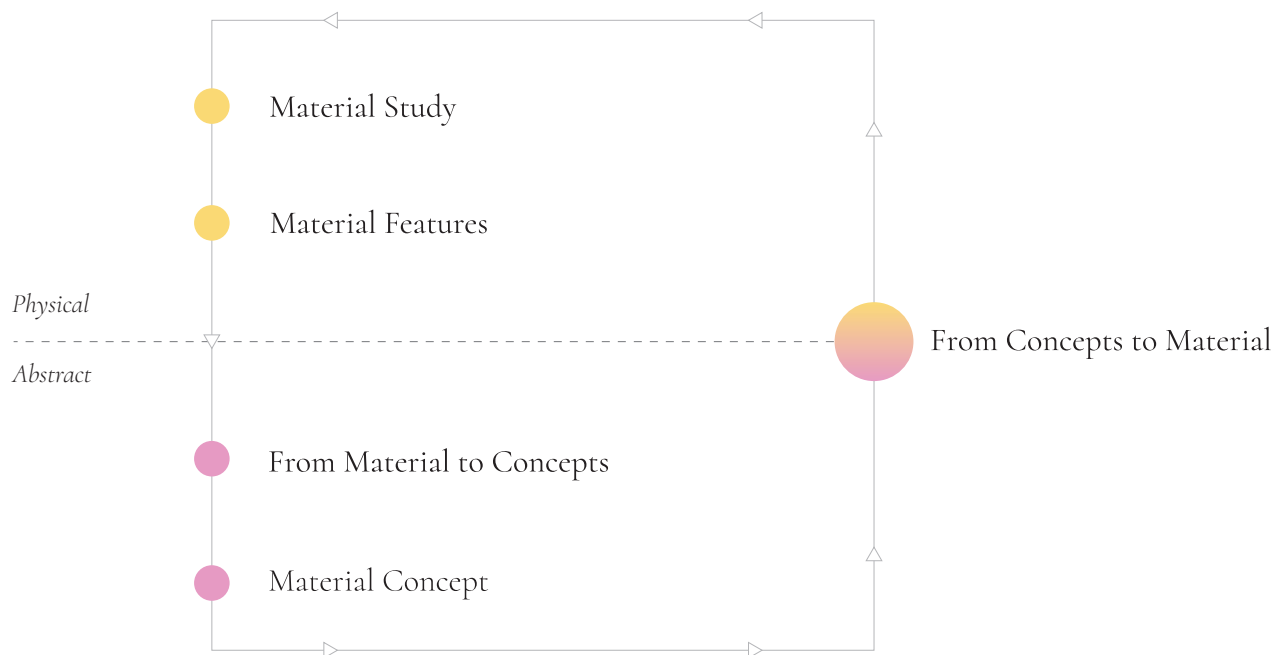
**Material study:** Explore a material and experiment to produce many samples

**Material features :**Select the features of the material that will be developed further

**From material to concepts:** Generating concepts linked to the physical nature of these previously defined features.

**Material concept:** The main concept that defines the process, a statement to summarize the knowledge acquired through the previous phases..

**From concept to material:** Create an outcome using from the conceptual and practical knowledge developed.



In the next part of this document I will demonstrate all these stages using Moving Bodies as an example to expand on every stage and show how I created a project using this methodology.







## *MAKING MOVING BODIES*

*A collection of all my experience while making Moving Bodies.*



After the first year of my master studies I was really interested in ceramics, because it is fun. I could spend days and days trying to make something and just the experience of doing was enough to fill me. As a matter of fact, the objects were a byproduct of the experience. A big drawback of it is the fact that I see no value on making a plate for example. In that case I find myself unable to propose anything new or different.

This thought haunted me during my studies because I was mainly studying to become a product designer. The classes were mostly about how to make usable objects. For example making tableware, benches, chairs, etc.

All of this was during the beginning of this thesis and I decided to start listening to my intuition and create from that. The only target user is myself, the only criteria is that I find it meaningful and the requirements were to have fun and follow my intuition. The goal is not a product, not a sculpture, but just something. The what and why were a problem for the future Camilo. This is the first time I have embraced my own personality as a creative tool.

After these opening thoughts, I would like to mention that during the whole project I was bouncing ideas back and forth with Tomi Pelkonen, the ceramic studio workshop master. He has plenty of knowledge to help me achieve my ideas.

The dynamic was to make several tests based on assumptions and then fine tune them with his help and comments towards a more likable result, this was rarely clear, mostly quite vague and confusing for me and Tomi.

The discussion and different perspectives enriched the process from both a technical point of view and through our different perspectives on ceramics. For example he would often question "what could you do with these?" or "what are you planning to do with these?" I never had an answer because there was no plan, just the intention to keep making, keep trying and further experimenting towards something I like. As mentioned before, the objects are just a byproduct of the experience.

One of my main priorities was to keep the facilities and equipment safe, so a constant review with Tomi ensured that no kiln, shelf, person or work was affected by my experiments. I started taking extra precautions after one accident in which some leakage affected a kiln shelf. After that, not even the biggest disasters affected the equipment.

### *What is liking to me?*

According to Boden (2004) aesthetic values are hard to recognize and identify since they are not conscious thoughts but the result of our exposure to a determined context.

*I may not have been sure about what really did interest me, but I was absolutely sure about what didn't. (Camus, 1989. p 119).*

Liking something is an individual process, it is attached to a memory or an experience. often we cannot point to the exact reason why we like something. For me, describing positive attributes is hard and counterproductive when evaluating my own work. however, pointing negative features of my own production is important to me, because I think the effort should be focused on solving said problems.

When I like something, it means that I have worked on it, evaluated and reworked it as many times as it takes for me to feel comfortable and proud of the result.

## *MATERIAL STUDY*

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### *EXPLORE A MATERIAL AND EXPERIMENT TO PRODUCE A BIG AMOUNT OF SAMPLES*

*The following section is divided by a sample per page, in each sample there is a physical description, my comments after the project and comments from the self interviews during the process.*

*I cannot designate a precise moment or object when this process started, because I was experimenting in the ceramic workshop and focusing on making and learning. For the sake of this document I collected the samples that represent the quest to discover and understand through making.*

*The next page is a map to understand the layout of each sample.*



Description



Sample picture

*Self interviews quotes*

Comments reflecting on my process,

A mix of glaze and clay would result in a clay body that is translucent, the glaze becomes liquid and fill the container, when the temperature drops it solidifies. Afterwards it was cut in with a diamond saw.



*I will call these glaze bodies, It is like a clay body but It is glaze.*

These were some of the first experiments that resulted in something different, This sample is basically the same as the moving bodies, but I did not see it at the moment, instead because of the cutting process that was especially difficult because the material is quite hard and the only available saw was in the glass workshop, so I decided to put this path aside.

A grid that drapes on top of a kiln column during the firing, the grid was slip cast, which means that while making these tests I had to figure out a mold to make the grid and it worked in about one out of four, the rest would break while taking them out of the mold.



*A piece moving and deforming in the kiln is usually an undesirable event but  
I could not be more excited for making more moving pieces.*

This grid caught my attention because of the captured motion on a static object, I liked the fact that it had movement on its own and I was able to scale it to around 30 cm x 30 cm, after spending time getting the same results I discovered there wasn't much to achieve if I do more, also the pieces were quite hard to produce.

A piece of clay pressed against the grid mold to make a more resistant grid, the casting process was easier but the solid part material meant that the draping wasn't happening, instead the piece was just breaking in the kiln.



*This is not going to work, I will try something else.*

In this step I felt frustrated because I wanted to make the draping pieces. But the casting process was making the grids too hard and if it was not a grid it would not drape, and just break. It appeared that there was not an easy way to make the grid.



Glaze and clay mix to get thick solid glaze pieces, different cuts and color test to explore thickness, resistance and translucency. There were slight variations on the contents and the firing process but besides the color there was not a remarkable difference between these and the first samples.



*This material has a nice texture and color but I don't think it is worth the hustle, it is just too much work and includes too many factors that slow me down. I just have to figure a way around the cutting.*

Making all these tests meant a lot of cutting, and every cut became more and more frustrating, it took too long, and nothing was changing. Besides this the glass workshop saw was not available and its use was highly restricted. At this point I abandoned these glaze bodies in order to focus in something that would require less facilities and time.

Glaze mixed with clay on top of a porcelain slab, by taking the container away, the glaze moved freely and formed a blob.



*This is quite sticky, so how about making it stick and move? I need to come up with some base.*

I tried taking the container out of the process to avoid cutting, this is a really interesting result because I saw the liquid nature of the glaze mix and many ideas were sparked at this point. This sample marks a point in which I discovered and understood the fluid nature of the glaze bodies, I was excited, intuitively I kept trying to work with these blobs.

A similar mix of clay and glaze, but this time it was mostly clay, the result was a translucent material with a bumpy surface, it moved in the firing but not as much as the previous sample. Some blue glaze was added on the surface.



*I am trying so many different things that something interesting has to happen at some point, it is just a game of numbers, I know there is something here.*

The mixing of clay and glaze was proving to be quite versatile, just a shift in the ratio would make a solid body or a puddle, I had my hands full with ideas and insights about the material, so I started doing more frequent tests and firings.



A glaze and clay combination suspended from the top of a cup. During the firing process the material sticks to the top and melts going downward, This particular sample was cut in half in the diamond saw.



*This is so exciting, I am definitely trying more of these. It is so nice is like a marshmallow sticking. It is nice how the movement is frozen in the piece. It is like a clay body that moves.*

After saying that I wouldn't cut anymore, I made these dripping pieces that had the material dripping using gravity. The problem was that it was all inside a cup, so I had to swallow my words and go to the diamond saw to see back to the diamond saw to see what was happening inside. The result was surprising in many aspects, there was movement, and structures formed by the movement.

A glaze and clay combination used as a surface treatment for a porcelain plate.



*I just tried to use all the material mixed, it was a bit of an accident, I like the texture but it's a bit gross, I definitely prefer something that has a volume. You know what it reminds me of people from Bogota spitting in the street for no reason, maybe that is why I feel that it is off putting.*

This was part of the same batch as the previous sample. I just used the leftovers of the mix as glazing for a small plate.

A thick glaze and clay combination used as a surface treatment for a porcelain plate.



*The volume makes this so much better, the material wants to be thick and have volume it behaves better when I try this.*

This time the layer of material was thicker, it looks nice, it looks like it is soft. I wanted to make pieces with more volume.



A glaze and clay combination, this is the result of a leakage in one of the gravity tests. It was stuck to the kiln shelf, as a result, the piece was broken to separate from the shelf.



*I am gonna try to figure out a way to release the piece without breaking it, it is going to be a hard blob.*

Frozen motion can be seen in these flowing pieces, this is what I wanted I was getting closer like this accident was calling me since the material leaked but it was fascinating. The material looks soft but it is really hard and sharp.

Porcelain piece filled with glaze and clay combination with a small porcelain grid embedded into the material. Cut in the diamond saw.



*What is better than something I like? Three of these things combined.*

I had several test that I wanted to continue or evolve, I thought the logical way to continue was to combine them. This test is the result of putting together all the good results obtained before. I liked one of the pieces because the result embodies the free movement I was aiming for in many aspects like the dripping motion and the grid frozen in a soft fall.

There was something special about this piece, I just did not know what it was.

Clay and glaze mixed with different amounts of iron oxide. The colors were mixed in a paste consistency to get different color gradient and lines. Cut on the diamond saw.



*It can be colored, that is good, this is a sepia piece. The earth tones remind me of something that I cannot define, maybe a rock I saw long ago.*

The different shades look good and the way they mix is nice the colors themselves are quite earthy at the moment I was feeling a bit down so this seemed to match a gloomy mood. Looking at it now, some time, the color looks nicer than what I remember. However I am not in those colors, I cannot see myself in these shades.



Color mix made by layers of pigmented material inside a porcelain container. Cut in the diamond saw.



*Cake. I see a piece of cake. I really like this piece, the colors the layers, it reminds me of home especially these days that I am surrounded by grey, white and black.*

The colored layers were a good result. They might be too festive, but these vibrant colors make the material more appealing and it also feels closer to me.

Porcelain piece with clay and glaze mix on the top, there is a hole in the center of the porcelain piece to allow material to pass. The mix is too dense and only forms a small drop under the hole, it does not drip.



*This looks cute. Is not quite what I expected, now I know it needs more space if I want to put it through a hole.*

My intention was to make the material drip and capture a flowing piece, but the mix was too dense. It did move but a small amount went through the hole, the material is too dense. My intention to restrict the movement using holes to control the motion was not having good results but I was too stubborn and kept trying to restrict the movement to achieve what I wanted.

I reused a sample to put low temperature glaze on the holes to color the structure inside the clay glaze mix.



*Color can be added to get different colors in the same material. I will try mixing the color techniques. (I never did)*

The colors were not the best, the glaze filling the little bubbles takes away from the appeal of the structure. I liked these back when I made them, now I do not, I was doing too much, the more simple tests were the better ones.



Flat piece with pigmented low temperature glaze to fill the cavities in the structure. The piece was sanded to expose the inner structure.



*This is a long process and the results are not that appealing.*

The softer surface from sanding reveals the inner structure without the sharp edges. The color was better but still did not convince me. Applying color to the structure was a process that required several firings.

An open structure of the clay-glaze mix with a colored porcelain piece embedded in it.



*A plate: The material does not want to be a plate. What was I thinking?*

I tried to make a plate, a failure, I do not consider the piece a failure on itself but the intention to make a plate is a failure.

Trying to make something in this early stage, that was a failure.

### *Material Study*

This concludes the first step of my process, an open research without any goals, just trying things, collecting different samples with many characteristics. At this point I had no ideas or plans for the upcoming steps, but my intuition kept guiding me towards trying new things and evolving in the process.

At the moment I did not make much of it, as I was trying to shape the material I was the one being shaped, the material was showing me what we both wanted. I ignored it at the moment. In hindsight all the elements used to make the final pieces are already present in this first step.

It took a lot of walking in circles to arrive to the final results, since an intuitive process is never linear. It takes a lot of repetition to connect and refine these raw ideas embedded in these samples.

When I look back into the process, It is hard to believe that I did not put everything together then, it seems so clear.



## *MATERIAL FEATURES*

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### *SELECT THE FEATURES OF THE MATERIAL THAT WILL BE DEVELOPED FURTHER*

After gathering information on the first stage, I selected three features to continue exploring: movement, structure and color.

**Movement** - *Different movements like flowing and falling. Gravity is the main factor in the movement.*

**Structure** - *The material can create internal structures as a consequence of the movement.*

**Color** - *Adding color through different methods like adding pigment to the material or adding light to the translucent materials.*

Once I selected the features, I continued testing, aiming for tests that would be centered in movement, because it is the most interesting feature, however structure and color are also part of this experiment phase.

There is no line that I can draw and state “This is where the material feature phase starts”, but the next set of experiments had at an intention. For example I want the material to move, drop, slide, etc.

An intention will be presented instead of the description since the samples are essentially the same materials presented previously, explored deeper in the stated features.

Inside of a porcelain cylinder the material is going to stick and flow through the wall making connections, that look like stalactites. Afterwards I cut the tube in the diamond saw to observe the cross section.



*What can ni do with this movement? Each sample just brings more questions.*

Some of the samples reminded me of stalactites, and I wanted to replicate something similar, is started using plaster pieces inside the kiln to prevent leaking into the shelves.  
The material was easy to take off the plaster afterwards.

I want to release the material from the porcelain, this attempt was made using kiln wash on top of a porcelain piece. It was still stuck.



*The kiln wash was promising, but is really stuck in there, I wonder how can I use the material without the porcelain, maybe using something else.*

The need to release the material was to be able to use it without making an extra porcelain piece, I wanted the material to be independent. I made many attempts to make something that would allow the piece to release like kiln wash would do with glaze.



If the material leaks, I had to protect the kilns, plaster mixed with molochite, aluminium oxide and kaolin allow me to build structures to protect the workshop equipment.



*Well the blocks I use to protect the kiln seem to somehow release the material, a layer crumbles off but it releases the material, it was there all the time. I figured it out now.*

Every Time there was an accident, I had the answer in front of my face. The plaster mix would stick to the material but then it could be peeled off easily. Leaking material makes a beautiful motion, it is again frozen in time, this accident triggered the release mechanism.

Material melting on top of a plaster piece covered with kiln wash: Release is really easy. The bottom had a concavity to test if the material could be cast.



*I feel more comfortable now, things are working out, I can make molds for this.*

This was a huge leap, I was able to achieve the release of the material and achieved the independence from porcelain. Now I was able to explore the material features with more freedom. The idea of casting the material in a plaster mold grabbed my attention as a result of this sample.

Mold casting attempt using plaster molds. The plaster would crack and the material would leak and stick to the plaster. All the soft texture is lost.



*The material does not want to be trapped, the negative results are proof of this.*

Immediately after releasing the material, I attempted to restrain it again, using plaster molds to make casting pieces. This was a mistake since I wanted more freedom and movement but without even realizing I was limiting the material again.



Casting with an open mold to keep the material flowing and have some of the soft texture



*This piece is not appealing, sure it released and everything but this is a step back.*

I was blinded by my ambition, I wanted to restrict the material, control the shape and the motion, this was a successful test in the sense that the goal was achieved, nevertheless it is a failure since the material just lost all its personality. There was movement but it wasn't frozen in time anymore.

Open mold to allow the material to slide.



*Not much is happening, the movement is barely noticeable.*

At this point I realized that there was no point of restricting the material. I was trying to control too much. Where was all the freedom that the material should have? The material should flow freely.

I repeated the same logic of the grids I made in the beginning. The material flows on top of a plaster column. The motion can be seen clearly and the material displays all the movement. The material would crack from tension that is wrapping around the piece.



*Gravity is the best way to display movement with the material, there is tension in the pieces and they broke, however this is a step in the right direction.*

More freedom makes better motion, the material kept showing me the way, If I made it comfortable and free, the material would create good results by itself. After this point everything came together. I swear I could feel the material telling me what to do.



A small blob moves on the side of a plaster piece.



*I had it in front of my eyes all the time, sometimes you need to try something to realize that  
you already had the answer.*

This was it. I intentionally recreated a leak, with the difference being, this time the leak was the piece. The material can flow as it wants. After this, I intuitively discovered that I had to give the material freedom to play and my role was to make the playground.

The material will flow, drip and make a puddle.



*Maybe I should think more and try less, explore this further, there is a lot of potential in this. It speaks to me, it is weird in a nice way.*

After I saw this puddle working as a foot for the block, I knew that the feet would be the best thing, it shows the motion, the texture can be appreciated and the piece itself is deceiving because it looks liquid and soft but it is just the motion suspended in time.

The material flows and holds the piece with a feet made of a drip.



*I am getting somewhere, I do not know where. At this point I can only keep going.*

I tried many different kinds of feet for the block, I felt connected to the material and the motion, I started feeling that the project was going somewhere, still I did not have a goal but I felt that I was progressing.



The material holding the plaster block on top.



*They start to have some sort of personality, this is Atlas.*

I had a goal now. I just wanted to rise the blocks using the flowing material. From this point on, I will refer to the material as a moving body, it was in this sample that I decided to name it. By giving it a name we became closer, as if we were friends now.

The moving body acts both as glue and feet for a broken plaster piece.



*I have many feelings, not words.*

I felt a bit insane when I made this sample. I have mixed feelings about this piece. Sometimes I look at it and I like it, and I feel I should make more. And sometimes I just want to forget I made it.

## FROM MATERIAL TO CONCEPTS

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GENERATE CONCEPTS LINKED TO THE PHYSICAL NATURE OF  
THESE PREVIOUSLY DEFINED FEATURES.

The whole project was labor intensive, full of repetitive tasks, repeating the same day over and over. Mixing, firing, cleaning then going home to make food, sleeping and waking up again to the same ordeal. After a couple of months I began to question my sanity and if there was even a point of doing anything. I got a familiar feeling of failure: this was not going anywhere.

I felt regret as if I dammed myself to a meaningless repetitive task like Sisyphus, according to the myth, he was condemned by the gods to roll a rock on top of a mountain everyday, just to repeat the same task over and over. Albert Camus compared this to the absurdity of modern human existence.

*"The workman of today works every day in his life at the same tasks, and this fate is no less absurd. But it is tragic only at the rare moments when it becomes conscious." (1991. p 23)*

When I realized that I was stuck and stalling, I forced myself to think, I had to think why I kept pushing the rock: To understand the work done and progress in the process.

I went to bed that night.



In a day like any other I woke up, and as if I was possessed, I went to the workshop. I felt like my body was moving on its own, I saw it in a dream, I said to myself.

I made some plaster pieces, mixed a new batch of moving bodies and waited for the pieces to dry.

The next day again felt like I was being controlled, the image was really clear in my head, "I saw it in a dream" I kept saying when anyone asked me what I was doing.

It felt like an instant but it took five days pursuing that mental image, that thing I saw in a dream. I started the kiln and went home.

Every time I start a kiln I remember that time in highschool when I failed ceramics a class.

The whole week I had severe memory lapses, my memories are foggy and weird. Something was happening, "I think I finally snapped" I said.

At the end of the seventh day I opened the kiln and saw three pieces, they were exactly that image I saw in my dream.

And like that, out of nowhere I made the first series of pieces using moving bodies called "Stream".

## STREAM

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*Deceiving visual references trick the eye. The pieces use the contrast between shiny and opaque, soft and hard, moving and still; Stream plays with the way we rely on sight to understand physical characteristics of objects.*

*Experimental ceramic project focused on glaze as the main component. The project centers around the material freedom to flow during the firing and the use of this properties as a tool.*











Stream was the name and description used for an exhibition where these pieces were displayed. It was a rough version of the meaning behind the moving bodies. At this point, the meaning, the material and the concept were so tightly knit together that it was hard for me to put it into words.

At this stage I started reading about philosophy and movement. I was exploring concepts to attach to the work, this was unsuccessful since the whole point is that the meaning is already embedded into the material and the maker.

“But Sisyphus teaches the higher fidelity that negates the gods and raises rocks. He too concludes that all is well. This universe henceforth without a master seems to him neither sterile nor futile. Each atom of that stone, each mineral flake of that night filled mountain, in itself forms a world. The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man’s heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy.” (Camus, 1991. p 24)

Every attempt to add meaning to the work just felt forced, I wanted to talk about existentialism, humans, works of art and deep philosophical questions that on their own are interesting topics, but there was already a concept present in the moving bodies and I had learned my lesson. If I force the concept it is not going to have good results: I need to hear the moving bodies.

I was improving as time went by, at some point I was able to predict with some accuracy what was gonna happen

to the next test, somewhere inside me I understood the material, this is something that I cannot explain how or why it happened. Polany states that “we know more that we can tell (1966)”, and through repetition and testing I had learned to understand the moving bodies, this tacit knowledge is the tool that allowed me to move forward, to step out of the workshop and reflect on the results of the previous phases.

I had to work together with the material, engaging in a meaningful relationship more than just material and maker. This had to be a collective effort towards our goals, what is a collaborative relationship then? “We can say that co-creation is a sensitive collaboration in which it is important to build trust and respect for each of the collaborating partners.” (Groth & Berg 2018) Ignoring the fact that they were referring to people, this was exactly what I had to do: Trust and respect the material. There was no superior philosophical question only me and the moving bodies.

The moving bodies were telling me that all this work is about us together, it is about us doing nice things, is about me making a playground for it to enjoy, is about the relationship we forged during this time, and as I stated before it is about the process not the result. Ironically this work that is supposed to be about me is now about us, the moving bodies and me, about our process of **material co-creation**.





## *MATERIAL CONCEPT*

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*THE MAIN CONCEPT THAT DEFINES THE PROCESS, A STATEMENT TO SUMMARIZE THE KNOWLEDGE ACQUIRED THROUGH THE PREVIOUS PHASES..*

During the project I evolved to understand and develop a connection with the material but when I asked myself: “What have you learned?” There was no clear knowledge in my hands as I did not improve as a maker of conventional ceramics, I realized that the result of my experience was a relationship with the material, a mutual understanding between maker and material. That is my tacit knowledge.

Following the idea of knowledge and experience, Malafouris states that “Potters know more than what they can tell or explain and their hand have often reasons which their mind is not aware and which the clay might resist or accommodate” (Knappett & Malafouris, 2010) I can relate to this idea, but after this experience I would rephrase this as makers know more than what they can tell or explain and their material have often reasons which they are not aware and both of them might resist or accommodate.

In this line of thought I created this concept:

**Material Co-creation:** Constant communication between the maker and the material has to be the drive behind my production using the moving bodies.

Material co-creation is the concept we created and developed together with the moving bodies for this project, the concept is simple. Everything should be produced in collaboration with the material, the concept itself is the result of the previous work and the relationship I forged with the material after working with it for more than a year on an almost daily basis.

The concept is a summary of the bond that the moving bodies and I share now, and our common goal to create something we both like.

With this main concept and framing, during the last phase of this project we made the series known as moving bodies.



## *FROM CONCEPT TO MATERIAL*

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*CREATE AN OUTCOME USING FROM THE CONCEPTUAL AND  
PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE DEVELOPED.*

Yes, I kept pushing the rock up the mountain, but I was enjoying every moment, from now on I just decided to push myself to produce bigger and better: I saw so much potential. One that I was not going to allow to be wasted just because I was not sure, I trusted myself and started making again.

With the knowledge gathered, I wanted to make a series of pieces using the moving bodies, in this last step two things had to be defined: Form and color. By form I mean what kind of shapes will I give the moving bodies to work on.



I started with the colors, adding pigment to the plaster and the moving body.

The soft colors for the plaster and desaturated tones for the moving body is the best combination, the darker tones look weird and they seem to be more serious, I like the playful ones, with a cartoon-like vibe, reminiscent somehow of candy.

Based on the colors, I decided to try round shapes since they seemed to match light and playful mood of the colors. I was full of self confidence everything was going smoothly.

The following step was to make my first “final pieces”, a series that I could call finished, I considered this the debut of the Moving Bodies since it was the first time I used the material with the intention to create finished pieces.



*"Like in soccer, you have to score in your debut, even if its an own goal" (Velandia. 2014).*

Everything went horribly wrong, the excess of confidence combined with my own stubbornness made of this first attempt a failure. However failure is when I learn the most, as I have learned in this whole process.

Once again I had started to take decisions on my own. Trying to force the shape, the material, the mood. I tried to control too much. I was trying to change something that I liked and did not need to be changed, once again I was being stubborn, and my partner was letting me know with the broken pieces. And the ones that were "successful" looked hideous.





What happened here seems to be a pattern in my behaviour at this point. I actually like the square shapes, there was no reason to change them. Then what was I doing? Ignoring my intuition. In hindsight I can tell that it was the need for closure. I was looking for a clear line that could separate test pieces from final pieces, the test pieces being the square ones and the final pieces the round ones. This was again a failure on my part just like the beginning of the project. In the entire process there are no division lines, I do not need them or require them.

After a few failed attempts with these new shapes, I reconnected with the moving bodies and went back to the square shapes. As Pallasmaa mentioned, "The craftsman need to embody the tool or instrument, internalize the nature of the material and eventually turn him/herself into his/her own product, either material or immaterial." (Pallasmaa, 2010) I needed to keep the connection with my material, with the moving bodies.

Now everything was set, everything was clear, we knew what we want, we know how to do it. Up until this point I have not touched on what happens in the workshop, the manufacturing process.

So next I will show how to make one of my final pieces.

I always isolate myself into my head, silence any thoughts and just work.

There is no better way to show what is happening inside my head than just let the images sink in and do all the talking.















































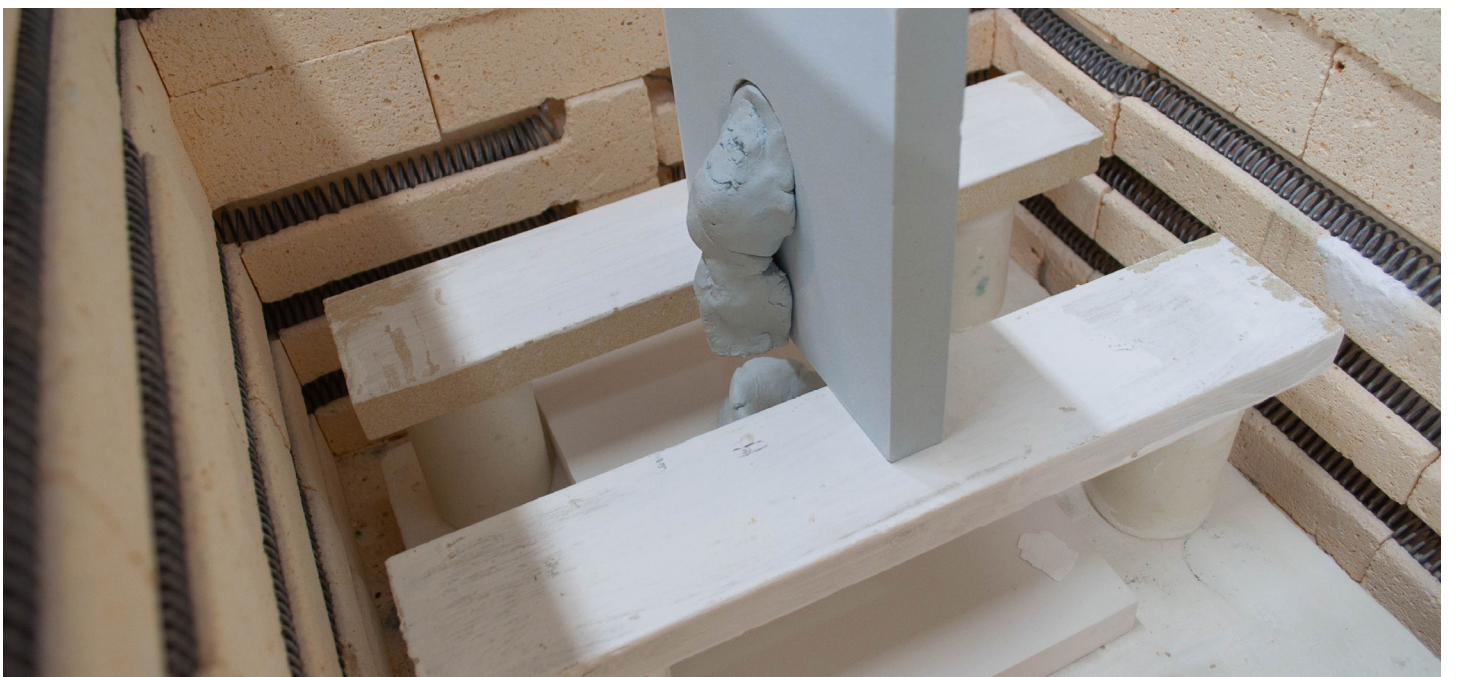
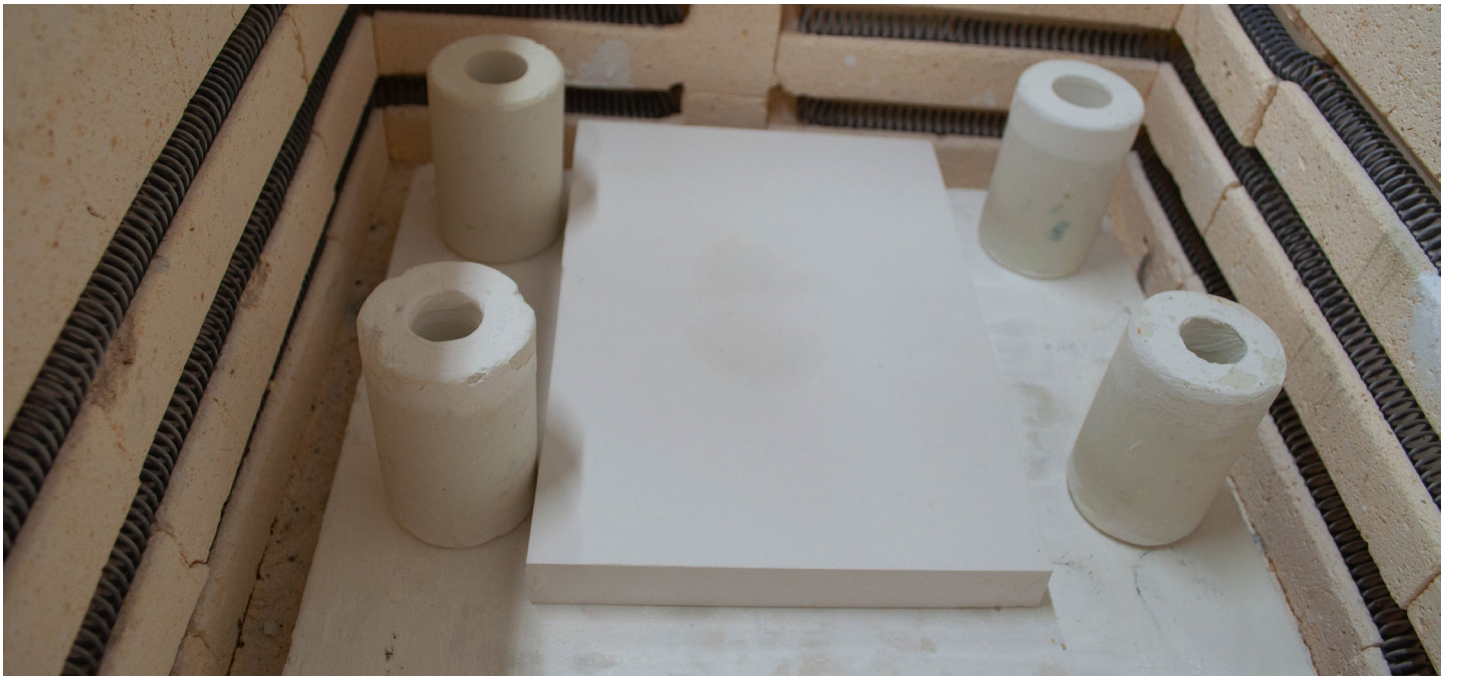












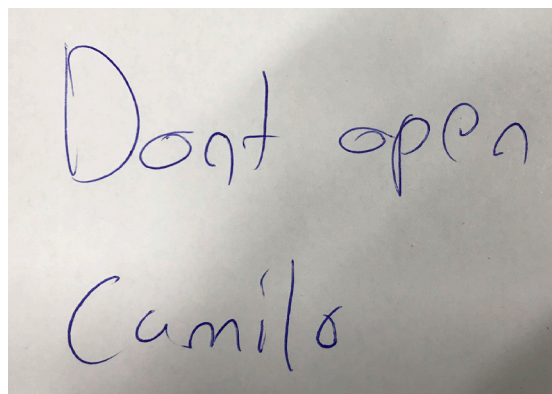










A photograph of a piece of light-colored paper with handwritten text in blue ink. The text is written in a cursive, informal style. The first line reads "Dont open" and the second line reads "Camilo".

Dont open  
Camilo

Once the piece is ready and the is kiln loaded, It is just waiting. Anxiety is the feeling that will be with me for the next two days, the mental images of everything going wrong and collapsing were permanent.





*I had several dreams in which I would arrive to the workshop and Tomi would be there standing like a statue telling me that I destroyed the kiln and school needed to be evacuated. I remember waking up with cold sweat with a feeling of paranoia.*

*“did that happen?”*



*"I did everything right" I would tell to myself while  
imagining a collapsed mess inside of the kiln.*















*Every failure is a learning experience. Some of the failures are beautiful.*



Finally when I arrived to open the kiln, adrenaline would rush up to my head like I did something bad.

Just some more waiting while peaking inside the kiln...

Since I could not see anything I was sure that it had collapsed. I went for a walk.





Now it's done.  
This is the first Moving Body.









## MOVING BODIES

*A couple of months went into the making of the pieces  
that form the series of Moving Bodies.*

*This is the product of material co-creation between me  
and the moving bodies.*





































The series were exhibited at Design Museo as a part of Emoveo exhibition during the Helsinki Design Week of 2018. The exhibition was a collective of work by Aalto students studying different interpretations of movement. My contribution was quite literal, as they are Moving Bodies.

In my opinion, the whole process was successful. I feel proud of these pieces, they make me feel accomplished, not only because they are something I personally like but because of the long journey we went on together. I can see myself in these pieces: They are a visual representation of my personality, as they are playful and strange in a way that I can relate to them.

The fact that form and color decisions were given to me by the process and the materials is an important insight for me, I think that an empty mind is the best inspiration, giving me freedom to make and decide by looking at my own blind explorations. There were no restrictions, commitments or references and yet something good came out of this process.







The process of creating Moving Bodies was far from precise craftsmanship, it is a series of accidents that eventually became more and more deliberate. Letting go of perfection in the beginning was an helpful tool in order to create a successful final result. As Eugene Delacroix states, “Artists who seek perfection in everything are those who cannot attain it in anything.” (1938) A flexible mind, free from the pursuit of pre-fixed ideas of perfection, is just as important as an empty mind while creating.

Each piece in the series clearly show the process behind making it, my artistic expression in guiding the material (through form and color), and a hint of cartoonish absurdity, which I pin down to the drip-forms and frozen-in-time aesthetics of the material.

As I look at the final pieces I can't help but to place myself in time as well, ceramic materials come with a long history. But today many creators, like myself, are exploring ceramics with unorthodox techniques and material combinations: Ignoring the tradition that ceramics represents for arts, crafts and design.

The book *New Wave Clay*, expresses this phenomenon as ‘Ceramics today are experimental, conceptual, energetic and considered. They speak loudly and are demanding of one's attention, whether formally or in its principles. They ask why, not just how.’ (Morris 2018. p 5). Moving Bodies embody the why, as the free flowing material is visually apparent. The how is a mystery to an uninformed viewer. For the reader of *How to be* Camilo Cortés, not so much.

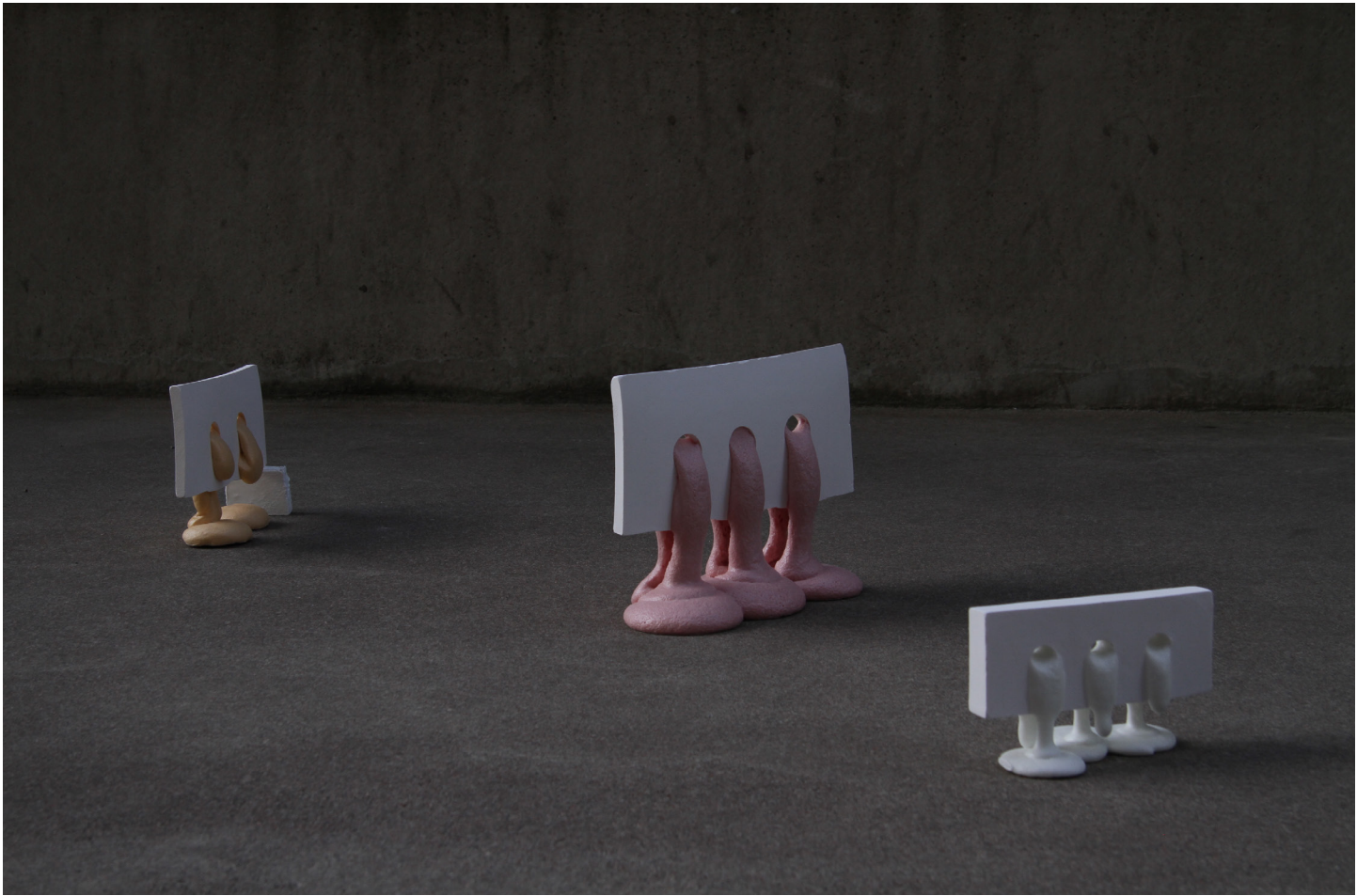


















## *HOW DO I CREATE*

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As stated before, I defined a practice led approach to enable me to do artistic work. By using a strong hands on method, in which the maker (me) has to be in the workshop, in a constant interaction with the material in order to understand and communicate with the material

Adamson (2007) defines work practice and site as three words important to define modern art, as he states anything made by an artist can be a work, anything an artist does is a practice and anywhere it happens is a site.

In this approach the objects are a byproduct of experience, the core and main drive is to understand the material as a collaborator of the maker, two parts working together to create; together creating concepts through experimentation to generate a transparent artistic expression since the maker is not giving meaning but instead is finding meaning by making.

This approach is to find concepts through interaction with the material and it is important to mention that this is shaped by my personal experience and intuition. The aim is to develop materials with a meaning embedded, one that is the result of the personal experience of the maker.

In *Moving Bodies* I divided the process in these phases.

**Material study:** I explore and experiment to produce material samples that exhibit physical characteristics of the material. These exploration is as broad as possible to produce a vast amount of information.

**Material features:** From the previous samples I choose features of the material that will be explored and used as the main drive of this stage. The exploration is more focused at this stage, new experiments can be included as well as revisiting, scaling and editing older tests..

From material to concepts: I leave the workshop and think of the recent discoveries and the process, what is the material telling me? I have to hear the material to define a concept to create using the same material. These concepts define the meaning, message and form of the outcome.

Material concept: By defining a concept through a short statement I connect abstract ideas and material developments that are the products of the experimentation phases.

From concept to material: The final step is the making of the outcome, all the knowledge gathered throughout the process comes into practice to create an outcome.

These steps are the result of my own hands-on approach and is the outcome of studying and understanding my own creative voice, they are my own definitions of a design process.

An important part of this process is based on repetition, just like Sisyphus, waking up every day to get to the workshop to make a new test. In order to be effective, I was focusing on the results of the day, not thinking of the long run, since the method allowed me to have a short term vision in favor of an eventual development.

## *HOW TO BE CAMILO CORTÉS 2*

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Now it is spring of 2019, the end of my studies, now I feel the urge to ask myself again what is next? what have you learned? What are you planning? I learned that you do not always need to plan, that doing is the best way to grow and you should always hear your collaborators.

The approach proved to be effective since the outcome is a project that has meaning connected to the material and the maker. I fulfilled my goals to have fun, to discover and create. The moving bodies that I co-created with the material is a series that I enjoy and the knowledge of the whole process adds more value to the work.









In spite of embracing the chaos and just sailing aimlessly, my approach helped me progress towards an outcome, without a framing method and thinking mechanism. I think I would be still making samples to this day, still asking myself “what is next?”

I need to mention that this approach might not be effective if you are not Camilo Cortés, I would rather dare you to create your own, to explore what lies inside of your own head. I think it was an effective way to understand myself and a step forward to find my voice.



*The project started with a blurry line in time, I still cannot point the exact beginning of the project, and never will, but the end of the project is not any different, and since I do not know what is next, I just started making again.*

















*This thesis started by making and finishes by making.*

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